

Washington, DC — A group of key Democrats, lead by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), urged the House and Senate conferees currently discussing the Fiscal Year 2004 Department of Defense Authorization Bill to accept Senate language regarding the implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) on the 25 million acres of military-owned land.

In a letter sent this morning, Democrats urged support for Section 322 of the Senate-passed bill, which would allow an Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) prepared by the Secretary of Defense under the Sikes Act to substitute for critical habitat designated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as long as the INRMP provides for the conservation of species and receives adequate funding. The Senate language, which was added to the Senate Defense Authorization Bill by a successful bi-partisan amendment, would give the Defense Department the flexibility it needs to maintain national security without sacrificing endangered species.

“Given the right direction and adequate resources, our military can achieve tremendous results for the environment. We should work harder in Congress to address this problem without compromising the survival of what the military is fighting to protect – a safe and healthy homeland,” said Rep. Earl Blumenauer.

Language that passed in the House bill could undermine the recovery of 300 threatened and endangered species on the 25 million acres of military lands. It would allow the Secretary of Defense to substitute an INRMP for critical habitat designation, but without a requirement that the INRMP assist species. In numerous critical habitat decisions the US Fish and Wildlife Service has expressly found that INRMPs would not provide adequate protection to justify reliance on these plans in lieu of critical habitat designation.

Both the General Accounting Office and former EPA Administrator Whitman have testified that environmental laws have not affected military readiness. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior already has the authority in Section 4(b)(2) of the ESA to exclude lands from critical habitat designation for any reason, including national security or an adequate INRMP. Moreover, the Defense Department has never sought a national security under Section 7(j) of the ESA.

Signers of the letter included Reps. Nick Rahall (D-W.V.), Ranking Member of the House Resources Committee; John Dingell (D-Mich.), Ranking Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee; George Miller (D-Calif.), Ranking Member of the House Education and Workforce Committee; Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans, Susan Davis (D-Calif.) and Ellen Tauscher

Blumenauer Urges Protection of Endangered Species On Military Bases

Thursday, 23 October 2003 13:00

(D-Calif.), members of the House Armed Services Committee; Edward Markey (D-Mass.), Thomas Allen (D-Maine), Hilda Solis (D-Calif.), and Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio).